# Public Works Week – May 21 to 27

# Building and maintaining the county road system

Clark County maintains more than 1,100 miles of roads and 75 bridges crossing rivers and streams. These travel routes range from major urban thoroughfares to backcountry lanes. All require inspection and upkeep.

Since 2004 the Public Works Capital Improvement Program completed projects to upgrade or add nearly 24 road miles in the county system, and replace the aging Lucia Falls Bridge. That list will grow in June when the county completes work improving and creating 1.3 miles of road along NE 117<sup>th</sup> and NW 119<sup>th</sup> near Klineline Pond and Highway 99.

Construction is also underway building one mile of new road from Union Road to NE 179<sup>th</sup> Street. Work starts this month to completely replace the deteriorating Betts Bridge across Salmon Creek with a new span. That work will be complete by the end of this year.

And then there are the motorist and pedestrian safety devices. Public Works keeps more than 130 electric signal light systems operating properly. These devices include traffic signals, school zone flashers and warning signals at railroad crossings.

### Who do you call about county road services?

If there is a problem with a county-maintained road or with one of those signals, just call 397-2446. Public Works manages a customer service line, with real people answering the phone during business hours, for residents or businesses to call. Last year almost 1,000 people used the service to report everything from potholes to malfunctioning signals. The department tracks and responds to each of these.

These customer service statistics don't include what county staff refers to as "call outs." Have vandals removed a stop sign? Is there a fallen tree in the road? Did the thunderstorm cause local flooding? When customer service staff get such reports, they dispatch crews same day. Often the responding worker will re-contact the caller to get more information or tell them the problem is resolved. There have been 360 such call outs to date this year. You can also request service online at the Clark County Web site.

## Protecting the environment

In unincorporated areas, county workers have lead responsibility for protecting the water quality of our rivers, streams and groundwater. State and federal laws require these actions, but the work also reflects the will of county residents. These activities include managing stormwater runoff, monitoring the water quality of county waterways, providing for proper treatment and disposal of wastewater, and effective management of hazardous wastes that could threaten human health and the environment.

Major roads, neighborhood streets and mall parking lots all create hard surfaces that can't absorb the county's generous rainfall. Instead, that water runs off and, if not captured and cleaned, can cause serious water pollution.

County crews maintain more than 550 individual water quality facilities that capture and clean runoff before it can pollute waterways. These sites include about 95 acres of enhanced or created wetlands that not only capture stormwater but also improve habitat for fish and wildlife while helping to prevent flooding.

In addition, the county's Water Resources Program monitors streams and rivers throughout the county for compliance with federal water quality regulations. Staff also develops and implements projects to improve water quality to meet federal standards.

Wastewater also flows through the sewer pipe system from toilets, sinks and commercial processes. For much of the county, this waste ends at the Salmon Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant. According to plant manager Kay Hust, the facility receives and treats for discharge more than six million gallons of wastewater per day.

Treatment systems at the plant process this waste, then releases water to the Columbia River that meets federal clean water standards. As the county grows, so will demands on the system. Work is underway to expand both the collection network of sewer lines, and treatment plant capacity.

### **Managing Our Solid Wastes**

People buy products at their local grocery, hardware and other retail stores. They use part of that purchase, and have either left over product, the container or packaging for the product, or both.

Clark County Public Works staff works county-wide with local jurisdictions to coordinate the effective collection and disposal of solid wastes. Once known generically as garbage, the identification and ultimate disposition of this post-consumer waste has become much more sophisticated.

Today, residents recycle or properly dispose of a significant percentage of the waste products that enter their homes. In 2005, residents in more than 91,000 county households recycled almost 34,000 tons of waste through the curbside recycling program. In addition, they disposed of more than 2.4 million pounds of material classified as household hazardous waste. This includes such wastes as leftover paints, pesticides and other harmful chemicals. That disposal total is up nearly 70 percent compared to 2000.

#### Department receives environmental management certification

Vehicle repair and maintenance shops can be messy, hazardous places. Or they can meet high standards for properly handling hazardous wastes, recycling automotive fluids and saving energy. The Clark County Public Works shop and fleet services facility on N.E 78<sup>th</sup> Street officially meets the latter description.

Recently, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency awarded Clark County Public Works an ISO 14001 Environmental Management System certification. The county is one of only two ISO 14001 certified county shops in the nation.

The Public Works Equipment Services Division maintains everything from motor pool sedans and county police cars to large excavation equipment and street sweeping trucks. That means using a lot of oil, transmission fluid, grease and related filters and parts.

The environmental management system now in place ensures proper disposal, recycling, and reuse of these hazardous materials. The approach is better for the environment, safer for workers and also saves money.

Examples of management changes include:

- Purchase of a high efficiency propane-powered steam washer to replace an old dieseloperated machine. This saved \$3,500 in replacement cost up front and reduced carbon dioxide emissions by 5,000 pounds a year.
- Bulk purchases of brake cleaner and transmission fluid. This switch saves money and eliminates the use of 1,700 aerosol cans and 1,300 quart bottles annually.

### **Education programs foster learning and citizen involvement**

Both the Water Resources and Solid Waste programs offer education and participation opportunities for students and adults. Many of these efforts are joint ventures with other public agencies and non-profit organizations in SW Washington and the tri-county area in Oregon.

More that 12,000 county students attended River Heroes assemblies during the 2004-05 school year. This program helps young people learn about the importance of clean water and what they can do to help protect water quality.

About 1,100 county high school students also participated in a regional water quality monitoring program. The emphasis here is on learning by doing field work.

Over the last four years, about 7,000 elementary school students attended a puppet show about proper use and disposal of pesticides and herbicides. The county has also been part of a regional effort to reduce the use of artificial lawn and garden chemicals, by teaching adults about natural gardening and landscaping.